

Best Practices Study:

Public, Education, Government Access

Background

WHAT IS PEG?

PEG is short for “Public, Education, Government” access. As part of the cable franchise agreement in Minneapolis, the City receives “PEG fees” from Comcast, which are to be used to support Public, Education and Government access television. The PEG fee must be used to support Public, Education and Government television, specifically:

- Public access, through the City’s contract with **Minneapolis Television Network (MTN)** to provide the “**public**” portion of PEG operations.
- Educational access, which **Minneapolis Public Schools** provides.
- Government access, which the **City of Minneapolis** (through the Communications Department) provides.

Comcast collects PEG fees from every Comcast cable customer in Minneapolis each month. The fee schedule was negotiated and set with the City of Minneapolis as part of the settlement agreement in 2006.

WHY A BEST PRACTICES STUDY?

Communities across the country are facing challenges in continued funding of their public, education and government access operations. These challenges are a result of a few key factors, specifically: budget challenges within local governments, increased competition with cable providers that may result in lower franchise and access fee revenues, and moves in some states to have state – rather than local – franchising authorities.

While cable revenues in the City of Minneapolis have been steady, Minneapolis has faced significant budget challenges since 2002, when the state of Minnesota began to make cuts to local government aid. Today the City receives \$41 million less in local government aid than it did at that time. Every City department has been forced to make cuts to their operations and to find new, more efficient ways of doing business.

It was in that context that a proposal was considered to make a \$250,000 cut to the City’s contract with Minneapolis Television Network to provide public access television. This cut would have freed up additional dollars to offset general fund dollars that are used to pay for government access television. Rather than make the entire cut, the City Council restored \$150,000 in one-time dollars for the MTN contract and directed staff to complete a best practices study to look at national trends for providing public, education and government access television in an effort to identify efficiencies and innovations that make the most of every dollar spent.

About the Best Practices Study

HOW WAS THE STUDY CONDUCTED?

The scope of this study was determined with involvement from representatives from Minneapolis Television Network (MTN), Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) and Minneapolis Public Schools. These partners were also a sounding board for the content of this report. In addition, we consulted with national leaders in the area of public, education and government access.

The information included in this report was collected through individual interviews with 12 select communities. A mix of cities was selected to reflect a spectrum of experiences by looking at cities of similar size, trends in the Twin Cities, and cities that stand out in some element of service delivery. Cities included are:

- Austin, Texas
- Bloomington, Minnesota
- Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Chicago, Illinois
- Denver, Colorado
- Eagan, Minnesota
- Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Montgomery County, Maryland
- Olympia, Washington
- Saint Paul, Minnesota
- San Jose, California
- Seattle, Washington

WHAT AREAS CONSIDERED AND WHY

There are thousands of Public, Education and Government access television operations across the country and a very wide range of examples of how those services are provided. To most effectively explore service options, this report has a sharp focus to examine those key areas of PEG that could offer the most potential for creating efficiencies (saving money) or improving services.

- Studio Space, Facilities & Equipment
- PEG Activities
- How Public, Education and Government access are funded
- PEG Channels
- Programming, Content Standards & Oversight
- Other Noteworthy Trends or Actions

KEY FINDING/S

In early prep work for this report, it was determined that the areas that seem to hold the most promise in terms of efficiencies (saving money) are around shared studio space/facilities and to some degree equipment. In terms of service improvements, some communities have found success in expanding the scope of public access to include specific efforts (or expanded missions) to address digital divide issues. There are also examples of communities that have instituted content standards and policies around program origination. Others have improved service and efficiency by creating networks that make it easy to share programming among multiple providers in different locations. This allows more than one community to see programming and it also eliminates the need to mail or upload content through more expensive or time-consuming means.

Best Practices Study: *Public, Education, Government Access*

1. Studio Space & Equipment

There is a variety of models for providing access (space) for Public, Education and Government television operations. In Minneapolis, each of the three PEG “arms” is housed and managed in separate facilities, with separate staff and equipment. This is a relatively common practice. However, there is a movement in some communities toward shared space, equipment or staffing, (either among the three “arms” of PEG or with a nonprofit/community partner) primarily as a tool to best manage available resources.

EXAMPLES OF SHARED OPERATIONS & RESOURCES AMONG PEG OPERATIONS

- Saint Paul’s public access provider, Saint Paul Neighborhood Network, also manages the City’s education channels for Saint Paul Public Schools.
- Similarly, San Jose has combined its public access and education access operations.
- In Grand Rapids, public and education access are in the same facility.
- Bloomington recently combined its public and government access operations. This was a significant change for the city and the transition took a great deal of debate and planning over several years. The services are in the same location, using the same staff, however there is separation in the setup of the facility. Studio hours for public access were determined based on user surveys and tracking usage schedules. During times when public access is open, government access staff does not use the studio space.
- In Cambridge, the education and government access share a school-owned facility. The two entities share a studio, but each has its own offices and editing suites. Public access is separate in its own facility.
- Olympia is surrounded by small communities that could not provide the same level of service on their own. There, four communities pooled their resources and created Thurston Community Television (TCTV). TCTV provides coverage for government meetings, school programs and traditional public access services, all in the same place.
- Fresno recently opened a new PEG center with combined services for public and education access in a City-owned building that had been converted from an old museum.

NON-TRADITIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

- Eagan secured a private partner in Thomson Reuters and now shares government and public access resources in the company’s corporate facility. In exchange for a negotiated number of hours of video support, Thomson Reuters provides the space free of charge. The studio, staff and equipment are shared by the government and public access operations.

- Seattle recently moved its public access facility into Seattle Community College. This provided significant space, equipment and staff savings because the community college already had staff with experience running a television station (Seattle Community College TV) and the operations share management, staff, studio space and equipment.

SUMMARY

The decision to move to shared space – regardless of what combination of the “arms” of PEG operations – is one that requires significant consideration. For example, the City of Seattle explored co-locating government and public access, but determined that it did not have adequate space or staffing to accommodate the needs of both operations. In addition, public access supporters were more comfortable with a model that maintained separate facilities and operations.

Community needs, the geographic location and available facilities all need to be considered. One of the most common facility/equipment sharing scenarios is between Public and Education Access, where the Public Access provider operates the Education Access channel(s). In communities where Public and Government Access share space, there are challenges to providing a location that is accessible to the public (parking, appropriate hours of operation). In addition, a facility that includes government operations must strike a balance between sharing resources and providing an independent platform for free speech. Bloomington accomplished this by providing a separate entrance and separate hours for use of shared studio space, but that city had the luxury of planning an entirely new space while the city was building a new “city hall” and art space.

Another scenario – where Public Access is in a facility that is shared with another agency (not PEG) also offers promise for reducing space (and in some cases equipment) costs. Creative partnerships, like those found in Eagan and Seattle, have found success but finding the appropriate organizations/businesses to partner with can be a challenge.

2. PEG Activities

There are consistencies across the country in Government and Education Access programming. It’s common to see: government meeting coverage, community events and informational programming such as short video segments, bulletin boards, non-English productions and news/interview-style programs. In addition, some educational institutions use PEG channels for distance learning, programming created by teachers and students and airing educational channels that do not require any local production (such as the NASA channel).

When it comes to Public Access, the programming and services run the spectrum. Some communities have scaled-back to the most basic of public access television services, with just equipment check-out/training, a studio and a platform for the public to broadcast productions on the PEG channel(s). And while some have scaled back, other operations have expanded services to include offering computer literacy classes, training in the use of social media, web development and running a media campaign. There is also a trend toward public access providers venturing into web streaming and social media, digital literacy, partnerships and citizen journalism activities.

BASIC PUBLIC ACCESS

Some Public Access centers provide only basic services to the public. In some cases, that has always been their focus, while in other communities they have scaled back due to funding challenges. Of the cities examined:

- Seattle’s public access operation offers limited staff, equipment and studio support for local producers.
 - Studio hours are limited to Wednesday and Thursday afternoons and evenings.
 - Producers are encouraged to create programs in the field rather than in the studio, which decreases the need for studio time.
 - Staff is available to assist when issues arise; however one eligibility requirement to use the studio is that producers have the skills and training to produce a program on their own.
 - Producers are responsible for generating their own video files of their programs, which they also upload to the system themselves. This eliminates the need for a staff person to rip DVDs and troubleshoot formatting issues.
 - No live broadcasts are produced because this demands extra staffing to ensure the broadcast has not glitches.
- Similarly, Eagan’s as well as Bloomington’s public access operations offer the basics: studio time, equipment and training on making a TV show.

COMMUNITY MEDIA CENTERS

There are several public access centers around the country that are dubbed “Community Media Centers,” which provide services beyond traditional public access television trainings and productions. Examples we found include:

- Cambridge provides traditional public access television services, but expands to include additional services, such as:
 - a computer lab hosting public drop in hours and classes
 - outreach programs for seniors and non-profits
 - a media arts and work experience program for under-served teens
 - an innovative citizen journalism program offering coverage of local issues and events
 - media production and technology workshops, providing access to emerging technologies and state-of-the-art media equipment.
- Grand Rapids also has expanded its available services to include:
 - operating an FM radio station
 - running a historic theatre which is a venue for films and performances
 - supporting citizen journalism with an online newspaper, “*The Rapidian*”
 - Providing website design and other technology support for non-profit organizations.

PEG ACTIVITIES: SUMMARY

From city to city, Public Access activities vary. Some communities have scaled back to just the most basic TV access services. At the other end of the spectrum are “Community Media Centers” with services that may include web/IT/social media, citizen journalism, computer literacy as well as expansion into the arts and other forms of media such as radio. While an expanded operation does require more resources, it also can open up additional avenues for revenue and opportunities to provide valuable services to the community. And, with advances in technology, some PEG providers offer multi-platform services, meaning that they are helping the public learn how to share content not just on PEG stations, but also on the web, YouTube and other social media platforms.

3. How Public, Education and Government access television is funded

No two PEG funding models are the same since each has its origins in the cable franchise agreements local (or in some cases state) governments negotiate with their individual cable providers. Cable funding can come in the form of grants, fees and in-kind contributions. In addition, funding can come from the local government, revenues generated from production fees, fundraising and other activities.

Funding from cable companies depends on the franchise agreement reached between the cable provider(s) and the municipality that is the franchising authority. In a few states, that authority is at the state level, but not in Minnesota where the franchising authority is still at the local level. As with other local franchising agreements, there’s a required 5% of gross payment by the cable company to the City. That payment is called a “franchise fee” and it’s paid to governments in exchange for the use of the public right-of-way. Every city included in this study receives a franchise fee of 5% of the cable company gross revenue. The franchising authority determines how franchise and PEG dollars are allocated and how channels are used.

BACKGROUND

The sources of funding for PEG access fall into three categories: funds from cable companies, public dollars and funds generated from other sources.

Cable companies

- PEG fees collected by cable companies from subscribers (an amount that’s designated in the franchise agreement)
- payments by cable companies required in local franchise or other agreements that can include:
 - franchise fees (5% of gross revenue) collected from cable companies by the local franchising authority
 - grants, anniversary payments and in-kind support
 - payments required in state franchising agreements (where state franchising exists)

Public dollars

- municipality general fund (or other) dollars
- school budget dollars (Education Access)

Funds generated by Public Access providers

- fees for services and sales
- grants
- fundraising/donations
- interest-earnings
- revenue from other services under the same umbrella organization
- revenue from renting out part of a facility

FUNDING ALLOCATION

Each franchising authority uses different terms to describe the various forms of funding received from cable providers through cable franchise agreements. For this study, “general fund dollars” will refer to funding from the city/local (taxpayer supported). This includes franchise fees. The term “PEG dollars” will refer to all other cable company contributions including PEG fees, grants and any other payments designated for PEG access purposes. Where not listed, Government Access is funded through general fund dollars. The figures for each entity listed are approximate and represent the most recent year where data is available.

- Saint Paul: Franchise fees: \$2.1 million (estimated for 2013)
 - Public Access: budget: \$2 million, \$858,000 from PEG dollars, plus cable company in-kind rent and overhead
 - Education Access: covered under Public Access (see above)
 - Government Access: budget: \$924,814, includes \$82,000 from PEG dollars, \$34,500 from Ramsey County (earmarked for the shared council chambers)
- Seattle: Franchise fees: \$7 million, PEG fees: \$2 million paid in a lump sum in 2006 to cover the 10 year franchise agreements
 - Public Access: \$187,000 budget from general fund (was \$700,000 prior to 2006)
 - Education Access: does not receive PEG funding
 - Government Access: budget: \$2.8 million, includes \$500,000 from PEG dollars
 - additional \$4.8 PEG grant over 10 years for arts funding
- Denver: Franchises fees: \$6.2 million, PEG fees: \$ 1.1 million, allocation of PEG dollars changes each year based on equipment needs

- Public access: budget \$1.5 million (note: includes non-PEG services), \$250,000 from PEG fees, the rest is from revenue-generating activities
- Education access: \$150,000 in PEG fees
- Government access: budget: \$1.3 million, \$300,000 from PEG fees
- Olympia: Franchise fees from four jurisdictions: \$500,000, \$230,000 PEG fees
 - Public, Education, Government Access (all combined): budget: \$720,000, \$478,000 from general funds, \$115-120,000 from PEG dollars, \$120,000 through revenue-generating activities
- Austin: Franchise fees: \$8 million, PEG dollars: \$1.5 million, allocation of PEG dollars changes each year based on equipment needs
 - Public access: budget: \$550,000, \$450,000 from general fund, \$300,000 from PEG dollars, \$150,000 through revenue-generating activities
 - Education access: \$250,000 from PEG dollars
 - Government access: budget: \$930,000, \$580,000 from general fund, \$350,000 from PEG dollars
- Bloomington: Franchise fees: \$975,452, PEG dollars: \$128,102, allocation of PEG dollars changes each year based on equipment needs
 - Public Access: budget: \$74,700 from general fund, \$17,300 from PEG dollars
 - Education Access: \$155,000 from general fund, \$20,000 from PEG dollars
 - Government Access: budget: \$433,000 from general fund, \$53,000 from PEG dollars

EARNED REVENUE

With uncertainty about the future of PEG funding, some Public Access providers are diversifying their sources of funding. That means fundraising, grants and generating revenue by providing services that go beyond access television, among other options.

- Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) generates more than 50 percent of its budget through non-cable grants, productions and other revenue-generating activities. Those activities include service contracts to produce programs for non-profits. SPNN also receives support from AmeriCorps to help close the digital divide and for other programs.

- Grand Rapids public access generates 65 percent of its revenue through “fee for service” activities, donations, underwriting/sponsorships, project grants, ticket sales (they operate a historic theater), concessions, membership and training fees.
- San Jose public access raises about 42 percent of its operating budget through grants, fundraising, production services and investments.

SUMMARY

Funding models vary from city to city, and some have recently undergone some significant changes, in light of budget challenges and changes in franchise agreements as well as franchise authority.

Education Access typically receives little to no funding through PEG dollars. Funds allocated for Public Access vary greatly, so some public access organizations are generating sizeable portions of their budgets through fees for services, grants and other fundraising efforts. In most cases, Government Access is funded primarily through general fund dollars or a mix of general funds and PEG dollars.

4. PEG Channels

The quantity of PEG channels depends on what is negotiated in the franchise agreements. The allocation of PEG channels among Public, Education and Government Access is determined by the franchising authority, which may take into consideration size and needs of the community, opportunities for sharing channel space, as well as the ability of educational institutions to manage channels.

QUANTITY OF CHANNELS

The City of Minneapolis has nine PEG channels, negotiated through its franchise agreement with Comcast: three for government three for public access and three for education. The number of programmed PEG channels ranges from four to seven in most communities included in this study. In Seattle and Denver, the cable agreements allow for up to 16 channels. In a few smaller communities, channel space is shared among PEG entities. For example, in Eagan, some channels are shared with neighboring Burnsville. Here are a few examples of how channels are allocated:

- Seattle has seven channels:
 - Public access: One
 - Education access: Four
 - Government access: Two
- Saint Paul has six channels:
 - Public access: Four
 - Education access: One
 - Government access: One

- Grand Rapids has five channels
 - Public access: One
 - Education access: Three
 - Government access: One

PEG CHANNEL TRENDS

- Denver's government access is upgrading to a tapeless, all digital format.
- Communities have begun to transition to on demand formats, where programming can be watched using options from a digital cable box. This allows viewers to watch a program on their own schedules. Montgomery County has been able to get improved show descriptions for PEG programs on the Comcast menus, which helps viewers find shows that may be of interest.
- With changes in technology, some communities such as Denver and Montgomery County are moving to a "video on demand" format for some programming. There are also examples of communities upgrading to high definition (HD) including Denver and Seattle, which can be a great expense, but allows for crisper images, so that PEG channels broadcast the same quality as commercial channels.
- Denver negotiated with the local cable franchise company to swap an existing PEG channel (which happened to be an analog, low number channel) in exchange for a digital channel and a one-time cash payment of \$250,000.

SUMMARY

The number of PEG channels is negotiated by each franchising authority, which also decides how those channels are allocated among Public, Education and Government Access. The number of programmed PEG channels in the communities we looked at hovers around half a dozen, although a few cities are entitled to up to 16 channels. While there can be a benefit to having a large number of PEG channels, with that comes the challenge to produce and program the available broadcast time. Some communities have moved to share channel space among PEG providers to ensure the channels are fully programs. There is a move toward utilizing "video on demand" formats, but this approach must be negotiated with the local cable companies, so it is not necessarily easy to pursue. More specific program descriptions on the cable channel menus also serve as promotional tools and provide viewers better information about what's on TV. And, in order to improve the quality of broadcasts, some cities are upgrading to high definition equipment on some PEG channels.

5. Programming, Content Standards and Oversight

There are some similarities in how programming is handled among different providers. That includes policies on what can and cannot appear on the air. However, some have stricter policies regarding programming that is not produced locally and programming that is considered “potentially objectionable.”

IMPORTED PROGRAMMING

Nearly every public access television center broadcasts programming that was created outside of the local area, which is often referred to as “imported programming.” Communities vary in how they manage imported programming.

- Most commonly, public access centers allow imported programming if it is sponsored by a member (a member is a resident or, in some places, a non-resident who has paid a membership fee).
- Seattle and Olympia have more restrictive imported programming policies. In those cities, the programs must be submitted by an organization (not just an individual). In For example, in Olympia, imported programming (which they define as having less than 50 percent of the program produced locally) must be submitted by an organizational member of TCTV. To be an organizational member of TCTV, the organization must sign up and pay a fee. The majority of imported programming is from the faith community.
- The Chicago public access provider will not approve airing of a produced series (more than one episode of a program) if it is produced outside the greater Chicago metro area.
- Grand Rapids prioritizes local programming for airtime over imported programming.
- In all of the communities researched, religious programming is commonly aired on public access channels.

CONTENT STANDARDS

All public access centers in this study have missions that include providing a platform for free speech but all have written content standards. All public access providers we looked at for this study require that a producer sign a release confirming that their program meets the content standards set forth in the public access policy manual. As a free speech platform, most public access providers allow programming for broadcast unless it violates FCC obscenity rules. Public Access providers can be challenged to make determinations on whether programming crosses the line between free speech and obscenity.

- Chicago’s public access provider’s policy manual includes this requirement:

In accordance with federal, state and local law, your program may not include the following material:

Obscenity

Your program may not include material which is obscene. Federal law states that to be obscene, material must meet a three pronged test:

- *The average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest;*
 - *The work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and*
 - *The work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.*
- Cambridge's public access users guide has an additional section in about potentially objectionable material:
 - *Potentially Objectionable Material*
Unlike obscene material, potentially objectionable material may be shown on CCTV's channels, but CCTV's staff will schedule this material between the hours of 11 PM and 5 AM. It is the responsibility of the program provider who signs the Cablecast Agreement to indicate on that Agreement whether or not a program includes potentially objectionable material.
Potentially objectionable material may include, but is not limited to:
 - a. *Strong coarse language, intensely suggestive dialogue, or coarse indecent language*
 - b. *Intense sexual situations or explicit sexual activity*
 - c. *Intense or graphic physical violence or degradation*
 - d. *Most forms of nudity*
 - e. *Graphic depiction of medical procedures.*
- Austin's public access provider outlines additional restrictions. Here are excerpts from the channel:
 - The media/artist understands, warrants, and represents that the program being submitted contains none of the following:
 - Any material that is defamatory, unlawfully disparaging or that constitutes invasion or violation of any person's right to privacy.
 - Any material that has a reasonable probability of creating an immediate danger or damage to property, creating an injury to person(s), or creating public nuisance.
- Seattle broadcasts a program notice advising viewer discretion must precede programs containing excessive vulgar language, nudity, extreme physical violence, graphic depiction of invasive medical procedures or indecent material.
- Most Public Access providers also have additional written policies about what can be in a program. For example, in Chicago, the Public Access provider prohibits programs with: gambling, solicitation, advertising, products or services, commercial identification, misrepresentation or illegalities.

- Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN) has pulled a small number of producers off the air because they have violated rules around commercial content. There are rarely complaints regarding content, with only two obscenity complaints in the past 13 years.
- Public Access centers also have standards for production quality, which include the minimum standards for audio and video levels. In addition, there are usually specific instructions for the format and quality of the tapes, DVDs or other media producers must use to submit programs in order to help prevent on-air glitches.

PROGRAMMING

There are countless types of programming including entertainment, educational and non-English. Here are some notable examples.

- In Chicago, the public access center has had some extraordinary success using broadcasting video bulletin boards. While this can seem like minimalist programming because it is usually just words on the screen, it has had proven results in Chicago. The viewer can dial a number on a touch tone phone and input the category that interests them and get the information. 80,000 calls were received when workforce program information was posted on CAN-TV about jobs and training information.
- In San Jose, the Public Access provider distributes video equipment to 14 schools throughout the city in exchange for educational content.
- Many communities have at least some non-English programming.
 - Cambridge public access airs programming in a dozen different languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian, Kreyol, Farsi, Mandarin and Bengali. Some of it is locally produced, but the majority is from the greater Boston area. It's handled the same as other outside programming: there needs to be a Cambridge sponsor.
 - Olympia public access has a small amount (less than 2 percent) of non-English programming, which includes Korean language church services and a couple of Spanish language programs. Both are produced and presented by local organizations. Occasionally there's a Japanese program, imported by the Olympia/Kato Sister City Organization. There used to be more, but the producers moved away and a couple organizations that had provided non-English programming ceased operations.
 - In Denver, one of the 10 theme blocks is reserved for Spanish programming, so non-English programming is close to 10 percent. However, just over 95 percent of the content submitted is in English. The Spanish and other non-English programming have more repeat plays.

SUMMARY

Providing a platform for public speech can create challenges for Public Access providers because some content may be deemed obscene, and therefore not protected speech. Public Access providers outline this in their policy manuals, and some go even further to describe rules about

“potentially objectionable content”, “material that is defamatory, unlawfully disparaging or that constitutes an invasion of privacy”, or “material that has a reasonable probability of creating an immediate danger or damage to property, creating an injury to person(s), or creating public nuisance”. Some providers also have rules about content that is not produced locally. In Olympia and Seattle, “imported” content will be accepted only if it is sponsored by an organization as opposed to just an individual member. In Chicago, series programs will only be accepted if they are produced within the greater Chicago area. While programming content varies, non-English and religious programming is common on Public Access channels.

6. Other Noteworthy Trends or Actions

Budget challenges, new technology and other trends have moved some communities to make changes to their service delivery, use of technology and other changes or innovations.

- Denver recently moved to a shared services model for providing Public Access as a result of budget challenges. In this case, the City completed an RFP for Public Access service and selected a new provider.
- Denver’s public access provider used grant money to develop software that is now being used in some form by several hundred PEG centers across the country. It enables community members to reserve equipment on their own and submit and schedule on-air content from their home computers.
- While Grand Rapids has separate PEG operations, it has been innovative in the way it uses technology to share content through File Transfer Protocol (FTP) lines. As a result, channels and programming can be shared even by facilities that are many miles apart. This allows more viewers to see programming and it also makes it easier for PEG providers to fill channel space with meaningful programming.
- Montgomery County’s PEG stations are connected through a technology network and can feed into a central location to make sharing content seamless. This eliminates the need to transfer programs onto DVDs or other formats of media and deliver them by mail or other means that takes time and resources. The connected network also allows live programming from a partner arts center so that live events can be broadcast on PEG channels.

SUMMARY

While the primary function of a Public Access provider is usually to provide TV access, Denver is an example of a city that has moved to a shared services model in which an existing media services organization has added public access to its menu of activities. That same organization, Open Media Foundation (OMF) developed software to automate some PEG functions such as programming, scheduling and equipment reservations. Other PEG providers, including those in San Jose, Austin and Seattle are also using that software. In addition, technological advances have made it easier for some stations to augment their programming by sharing content that is of interest to more than one community.

7. Conclusions

Communities provide PEG access in a variety of ways, and there is clearly much that can be learned from the innovations that are happening throughout the county, particularly about how to ensure that PEG operations survive, even in these difficult budget times. PEG providers around the country are evolving to remain relevant in an age of fast-moving technological advances and multi-platform communications.

In some places, PEG access centers serve a role similar to the public library, where free and low cost technology services are available to everyone and ultimately help improve the community. Some cities have found ways to integrate PEG access with job training, youth enrichment and digital divide goals while others are maintaining only the most basic PEG services. We have also seen some PEG facilities close for various reasons. According to a survey by the Alliance for Communications Democracy, “PEG Access Centers, which had previously served at least 100 communities, have been closed since the onset of state cable franchising laws in 2005.” In that same survey, the primary reasons cited for reductions in funding to PEG entities were new state franchising laws and/or decisions by local governments.

Communities that have made significant changes to PEG models have not done so in haste. A change can take a year to 18 months or more to properly implement, depending on the need to relocate, establish policies and adhere to contracts and/or leases. And a change requires careful consideration of long-term costs and needs of the community.